What is expertise-oriented evaluation approach?

* One of the oldest and most used evaluation methods that relies on professional expertise to review programs, products, etc
* Primarily subjective input from the expert that informs the evaluation process
* Usually done by more than one ‘expert’- e.g. committees, panels, peer reviews, etc.
* Use of formal, informal, ad hoc panel and ad hoc individual reviews

What are formal reviews?

* The ‘formal professional review’ system usually includes a structure to do periodic reviews; have published standards for these reviews; pre-established schedule; option of panel of experts to reach judgments of value; and, have an impact on the status of what is reviewed.
* Accreditation is often associated with such a professional review system, where members of the review team are current members of said profession
* Lack of agreement on whether the ‘accreditation’ bodies are actually evaluative in nature
* While these bodies tend not to have any formal authority over institutional change, there is some agreement that when recommendations come forward from the group it is likely that the institution will endeavor to make some degree of the recommended change
* There is a concern that these bodies fail to do a good job of policing themselves

What is the role of an informal review system?

* Some bodies have a structure and a set of procedures but lack a formal review system
* Employ the opinions of multiple experts

What is the role of an ad hoc panel review and individual reviews?

* No set schedule of meetings – tend to meet on an ‘one off basis’.
* No preset structures or standards, but employ opinions of many experts
* In ad hoc individual are much the same as panel review, other than it is completed by one expert.

What is the role of the ‘critic’ in evaluation?

* The role of the critic or connoisseurship could be likened to an ‘expert’ review process, where the critic has had considerable experience reviewing whatever it is they are ‘critically’ observing

How is the participant approach to evaluation different for those discussed prior?

* This perspective came about as a means to counter what some evaluation theorists saw as insensitive approaches to evaluation found in the traditionalist stream
* For the proponents of this perspective, the ‘participant’ is central to the evaluation process
* As noted in the outset of the course, evaluators should have the role of advocating for the ‘voiceless’ where the preceding approaches see the evaluator as being without bias
* Some of the common characteristics of this approach are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Dependence on inductive reasoning    * Grassroots observation and discovery 2. Use of multiple forms of data    * Subjective/objective; qualitative/quantitative | 1. Do not follow a standard plan    * Process evolves as participants gain experience in the activity 2. Record multiple rather than single realities    * Individuals have different perceived realities    * No one perspective is seen as true |

What are some of the main evaluation ‘frameworks’ that fall under the participant-oriented evaluation approach?

* Stake’s Countenance Framework
  + Stake’s work laid the foundation for much of the following working in this area
  + For Stake, the 2 ‘countenances’ of evaluation are *description* and *judgment,*
  + Within this framework, the evaluator must:
    1. Provide a background, justification and description of the program rationale;
    2. List intended antecedents (inputs, resources, existing conditions), transactions, (activities, processes), & outcomes;
    3. Record those items in #2, including listing unexpected outcomes;
    4. Explicitly state the standards for judging those items #2; and
    5. Record the information as it relates to those items #2.
  + Through the use of a description matrix, the evaluator can look at congruence between intents and observations, and by looking at dependencies of outcomes on transactions and antecedents, and transactions on antecedents (Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004, p. 135).
* Responsive Evaluation
  + Stake’s expansion on his original countenance framework – it is less formal, more pluralistic and process focused than the preceding framework
  + Central focus of this approach is to address concerns and issues of stakeholder audience
  + Stake (as cited in Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004) suggested that “responsive evaluation is what people do naturally in evaluating things. They observe and react” (p. 136). For Stake it was the focus on dong what comes natural, and therefore it doesn’t make sense to follow some set of rules to guide the evaluation plan.
  + Evaluation should relate to program activities rather than program intents
  + For Stake, the ultimate test of evaluation is whether it informs the participants understanding of what is being evaluated – this is garnered through ongoing interaction between the responsive evaluator and participants
  + Recommendations come in the form of judgments on preferred outcomes, etc
* Naturalistic evaluation
  + The evaluator is seen as the learner, where the participants are the teachers as they interacted, unimpeded by the evaluator, in their natural environment
  + Triangulation is used as a means to establish credibility of data
  + Applicability of data is enhanced by the development of a working hypothesis
* Participatory Approach
  + This notion of evaluation looks at the participant, not in terms of the individuals that partake in the program being evaluated, but (if I understand this correctly) program coordinators who work closely with an evaluator it “inform and improve program implementation” (Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004, p. 142).
* Utilization-Focused Evaluation
  + This approach suggests that evaluations should be judged by how it will be used, and whom it will be used by. Therefore it is imperative that the end users be involved in the evaluation development process from beginning to end. (Given that the end users may not be participants, I am not sure how this is deemed a participant model, unless the participants are those that use the outcomes, not the individuals partaking in the program??
* Empowerment Evaluation
  + Extension of the belief that evaluators should be advocates or the voice of the disenfranchised
  + According to Fetterman (as cited in Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004) the following advantages are inherent in empowerment evaluation:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Training 2. Facilitation 3. Advocacy | 1. Illumination 2. Liberation |

* + Tends to be a lack of agreement on what constitutes the ‘empowerment approach’
  + The slide presentation suggests that empowerment evaluation is used as a means to increase the likelihood of achieving program success through giving the stakeholders of the program the tools for ‘planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program’ (Fetterman, 2007, slide 15)

In terms of the evaluation approaches discusses over the last 5 chapters...what is the good, bad and ugly?

* In terms of determining where the field of evaluation stands, it is imperative to remember that evaluation, in and of itself, is not housed in one particular discipline, indeed it is based on many disciplines
* The approaches listed in the preceding chapters do not make the litmus test as being models or theories. However, that doesn’t take away from the fact that they are useful in helping evaluators have some type of logical structure from which to begin the process of evaluation
* Concern that some of the language used to describe evaluative events; tend to be housed in a negative connation; because of human nature people tend to lie and evade questions because of the belief the being in an evaluative process leads to anxiety;
* Because of these inherent concerns, the notion of evoking more positive images or metaphors to describe the notion of evaluation, e.g. – appreciative inquiry (AI).

As I was doing the readings for this assignment, I found that the notion of asking myself questions, and reflecting on what I was reading coming a little more naturally then it did a couple of weeks ago. And interestingly, I would find myself stopping and reflecting on what I read, make some notes, and then, as I continued on with the reading, I often would find confirmation or discussion about some of the points that I had been contemplating. So yes Cyril, this process is proving to be very useful!

There was much valuable information to consider in the three chapters covered for this session...so bear with me as I jump around somewhat to reflect on my impressions of the text.

In the section on expertise-oriented evaluation approach, I found the inclusion of the ‘critic’ as being cast as a type of evaluator/evaluation a little surprising; but upon further consideration, I realize that indeed that is what the role of a professional critic is...an evaluator of sorts. However, some questions that immediately came to mind were, “how does the critic become anointed as an expert?” Am I an ‘expert’ movie critic if I regularly watch movies? And “how do we account for personal bias?”; it seems to me, that it far more likely to creep in, given (or maybe not given) that a critic doesn’t use a structured, or reliable (using the research notion of reliability) form of evaluation. Of course the argument is that the same could be said for other examples of evaluation that were covered in the preceding chapters; but for me, the notion of a ‘critic’ as a ‘formal’ evaluator is bothersome; it just seems to subjective. However, as I consider the plausibility of the ‘critic’ as evaluator, I guess that is really what a critic does... evaluating or as Eisner (as cited in Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004) suggests, “criticism is not a negative appraisal...but rather an educational process intended to enable individuals to recognize qualities and characteristics that might otherwise have been unnoticed and unappreciated” (p. 121). Definite food for thought...!

In reviewing the participant oriented approach I was intrigued with how this approach came to fruition; the fact that the 4 ways of evaluation that we had reviewed thus far do not focus on servicing the needs for whom the program are developed for (Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004)*.* I think the argument could be made while the participant isn’t the central focus as described in this chapter, in reality, and quite likely depending on the evaluator, the participant is ultimately the central focus...at least in my naive and optimistic view!

So what about the participant –oriented approach? It was developed to be more responsive, and interactive. Accordingly, the evaluator does not follow a preordained set of rules, but is open to ‘respond and react’ according to the situation at hand. Furthermore, it is the participants that guide the process and outcomes, and ultimately it is up to the participants whether the evaluator writes a report or not!! How is it possible to share information for program improvement, if there is no written documentation of that which is being evaluated!! To me, this approach seems to be very much qualitative in nature, likened to the phenomenological methodology where by the goal is an understanding the true essence of the participants and their experience as it relates to the program. Not necessarily a bad thing, but not sure it should be the central focus of an evaluative process.

In terms of the participant-oriented approach, I don’t see it as a complete write off...there is definite value in considering some of its merits. I found Stark’s clock to be of use, since for me, it provides a starting point in which to frame what it is that needs to be done and what questions need to be asked. For me, I see the responsive approach as being used to enhance other approaches to evaluation, which leaves me to ponder how I can tie this responsive evaluation process into the use of , say, a management oriented approach; can I use it to inform how I engage my stakeholders?

I find myself at a bit of a crossroads in considering the role of evaluator as an advocate. I like the notion of empowering the disenfranchised but how can I align that with the gaining information needed to make informed decisions. I do want to hear the stories from those in programs as a means to inform and improve, but it terms of accountability how do I meld this in with a more traditional approach. And given the time it would take to do this approach justice it is likely far too costly in terms of human resource requirements and budgets. One point I found of interest in the participant-orientation approach is that one of the methods involved the inclusion of a staff member that is very much attached to the program as an informant. And in fact, I would say that we do have that in place, and I rely heavily on my coordinator’s input on program direction. However, that is very much based on the fact that I trust their input.

One of the most important things that came out of chapter 9 was the caution to not be a ‘disciple’ to one particular approach to evaluation. I think it is incumbent on us to ensure that what is being evaluated guides our decision on choice. Furthermore, it seems to make sense that as evaluators we can take components of each of the different models in order to fit the need of decision-makers, stakeholders, and participant. Of further interest is the authors rhetorical question asking “how will one know which approach is best for a given situation” (Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004, p. 156). Indeed the question of the hour for the novice evaluator. However, the authors suggest that at this time there is no research to help guide in our decision making for choice...and if I can comment out loud, even if there was research, we would likely be no closer to ascertaining what model would fit best in a given situation. Given the plethora of philosophical leanings of those engaged in developing different approaches to evaluation, there is apt to ever be any agreement on best choices. Indeed, isn’t that the idea of having different approaches, and different thoughts on what works best. Thus, I felt reassured when Worthen (as cited in Fitzpatrick, *et al.,* 2004), upon reflection, acknowledged to his class that in using evaluative approaches, he weaves components of many of the different views to meet the need of the situation ; sage and comforting advice I thought. It is okay to be eclectic, while being cognizant of understanding the philosophy behind the approaches used.

References

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